













## Miscellany.

## THE DRESS OF FRIENDS.

[From an article on the Customs of Friends in the *British Friend*.]

They stand distinguished by means of it from all other religious bodies. The men do not wear lace, frills, ruffles, or any of the ornaments worn by the fashionable world. The women wear no lace, flounces, paper, rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, nor anything belonging to this class. Both sexes are also particular in the choice of the colour of their clothes. All gay colours, such as red, blue, green, and yellow, are exploded. Dressing in this manner, a member of this Society is known by his apparel through the whole kingdom. This is not the case with any other individuals of the island, except the clergy; and these, in consequence of the black garments worn by persons on account of the death of their relations, are not always distinguishable from others.

I know of no custom among Friends which has more excited the curiosity of others than this of their dress, and none in which they have been more mistaken in their conjectures concerning it.

In the early times of English history, dress was frequently regulated by the government.—See *Strutt's Antiquities*. Persons of a certain rank and fortune were permitted to wear only clothing of a certain kind. But these restrictions and distinctions were gradually broken down; and people, as they were able and willing, lavished their money on the extravagance of their dress. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and down from thence to the time when Friends first appeared, were periods particularly noticed for prodigality in the use of apparel. There was nothing too expensive or too preposterous to be worn. Our ancestors, also, to use an ancient quotation, "were never constant to one colour or fashion; two modes at a time they can have, by surveying the present generation, of the folly in such respects of these early ages. But these follies were not confined to the laity. Affectation of parade and gaudy clothing were admitted among many of the clergy, who incurred the severest invectives of the poets on that account. The Ploughman in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is full upon this point. He gives us the following description of a priest.

"That he on horse wylthe to ride,  
In gyltynas gold of great array,  
Ypainted and ported all in pryde,  
No common knight may go gaye;  
Change of clothyng every daye;  
With goldeyn girdle an erest small;  
As beyns as it were at baye;  
All echs falshe mote nyde faye."

To this he adds that many of them had more than one or two mitres, embellished with pearls like the head of a queen, and a staff of gold set with jewels, as heavy as lead. He then speaks of their appearing out of doors with broad bucklers and long swords, or with baldricks about their necks, instead of stoles, to which their bandiers were attached.

"Bucklers brode and awerds long,"

"Baudrye with baselards kene."

He then accuses them with wearing gay gowns of scarlet and green colours, ornamented with cut work, and for the long pykes upon their shoes.

But so late as the year 1652 we have the following anecdote of the whimsical dress of a clergyman: John Owen, dean of Christ-church, and vice-chancellor of Oxford, is represented as wearing a lawn band, as having his head shaved, and his hair cut roundly combed. He is described, also, as wearing Spanish-leather boots with lawn tops, and snake-bone hand-strings with large tassels, and a large set of ribbands pointed at his knees with points or tags at the end. And much about the same time, when Charles II. was at Newmarket, Nathaniel Vincent, doctor of divinity, fellow of Clarendon, and chaplain in ordinary to his majesty, preached before him, and the kind of dress which he wore, and the manner of this preacher's dress, that he commanded the duke of Monmouth, then chancellor of the University, to cause the statutes concerning decency of apparel among the clergy to be put into execution; which was accordingly done.

These instances are sufficient to show that the taste for preposterous and extravagant dress must have operated like a contagion in those times, or the clergy would scarcely have dressed themselves in this ridiculous and censurable manner.

But although this extravagance was found among many orders of society at the time of the appearance of George Fox, yet many individuals had set their faces against the fashion of the world. These consisted principally of religious people of different denominations, most of whom were in the middle classes of life. Such persons were found in plain and simple habits, notwithstanding the contagion of the example of their superiors in rank. The men of this description generally wore plain round hats with common crowns. They had discarded the sugar-loaf hat, and the hat turned up with a silver clasp on one side, as well as all ornaments belonging to it, such as pictures, feathers, and bands of various colours. They had adopted the plain round cap, or they wore cloaks, or necessary, or of other robes; but both the clothes and the cloaks were of the same colour. The colour of each of them was either drab or gray. Other people, who followed the fashions, wore white, red, green, yellow, violet, scarlet, and other colours, which were expensive, because they were principally dyed in foreign parts. The drab consisted of the white wool undyed; and the gray of the white wool mixed with black, which was undyed also. These plain colours were the colours of the clothes, because they were the least expensive, of the peasants of England, as they are now of those of Portugal and Spain. They had discarded, also, all ornaments, such as lace, or bunches of ribbands at the knees; and their buttons were generally of alchymy, as this composition was then termed, or of the same colour as their clothes.

The grave and sober women, also, like the men, had avoided the fashions of their times. These had adopted the cap and the black hood for their head-dress. The black hood had been long the distinguishing mark of a grave matron. All prostitutes, so early as Edward III., had been forbidden to wear it. In aftertimes it was celebrated by the poets by epithet of venerable, and had been introduced by painters as the representation of a virtuous woman. When Friends first met in religious union, they met in these simple clothes. They made no alteration in their dress on account of their new Society, but they were not expensive—because they were not dyed. To this gown was added a green apron. Green aprons had been long worn in England; yet, at the time I allude to, they were out of fashion, so as to be ridiculed by the gay; but old-fashioned people still retained them. Thus an idea of gravity was connected with them; and therefore religious and steady women adopted them as the grave and sober garments of ancient times.

It may now be observed, that from these religious persons, habited in this manner in opposition to the fashions of the world, the primitive Friends generally sprung. George Fox himself wore the plain gray coat that has been noticed, with alchymy buttons, and a plain leather girdle about his waist. When Friends, therefore, first met in religious union, they met in these simple clothes. They made no alteration in their dress on account of their new Society, but they were not expensive—because they were not dyed. To this gown was added a green apron. Green aprons had been long worn in England; yet, at the time I allude to, they were out of fashion, so as to be ridiculed by the gay; but old-fashioned people still retained them. Thus an idea of gravity was connected with them; and therefore religious and steady women adopted them as the grave and sober garments of ancient times.

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tion as men paid attention to these outward decorations and changes, they suffered some loss in the value and dignity of their minds. He considered, also, all such decorations and changes as contrary both to the letter and the spirit of the Scriptures. Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets under the Law, had severely reproved the daughters of Israel on account of their thinking ornaments, curls, round tires, chains, bracelets, rings, and ear-rings. St. Paul, also, and St. Peter, had both of them cautioned the women of their own times to adorn themselves in modest apparel, and not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. And the former had spoken to both sexes indiscriminately not to conform to the world; in which latter expression he evidently included all those customs of the world, of whatever nature, that were in any manner injurious to the morality of the minds of those who follow them.

By the publication of these sentiments, George Fox showed to the world that it was his opinion that religion, though it prescribed no particular form of apparel, was not indifferent as to the general subject of dress. These sentiments became the subject of a new fashion. When the members of its first met in union, they consisted of grown-up persons; of such as had had their minds spiritually exercised; and their judgments convinced in religious matters; of such, in fact, as had been Friends in spirit before they had become such by name. All admissions, therefore, on the subject of dress were unnecessary for and new to the many who had joined the Society, brought with them children into it, and, from the marriages of others, children were daily springing up. To the latter, in a profane age, where the fashions were still raging from without, and making an inroad upon the minds and morals of individuals, some cautions were necessary for the preservation of their innocence in a storm. At this point of age, they were Friends by name before they could become such in spirit. Robert Barclay, therefore, and William Penn, kept alive the subject of dress, which George Fox had been the first to notice in the Society. They followed him on his scriptural ground. They repeated the arguments, that extravagant dress manifested an earthly spirit, and that it was productive of vanity. They strengthened the case by adding arguments of their own. Among these I may notice, that they considered what were the objects of dress. They reduced these to two—to decency and comfort—in which latter idea was included protection from the varied inclemencies of the weather. Everything, therefore, beyond these they considered as superfluous, of course, all ornaments, and all become censurable, and all unreasonable changes indefensible, upon such a system.

These discussions, however, on this subject, never occasioned the more ancient members to make any alteration in their dress; for they continued, as when they had come into the Society, to be a plain people. But they occasioned parents to be more vigilant over their children in this respect, and they taught the Society to look upon dress a subject connected with the Christian religion, in any case where it could become the injurious cause of a disquiet of the mind. In process of time, therefore, as the fashions continued to spread, and as the youth of the Society began to come under their dominion, Friends incorporated dress among the other subjects of their discipline. Hence, no member, after this period, could dress himself preposterously, or follow the fleeting fashions of the world, without coming under the authority of friendly and wholesome admonitions, to counsel him to dress as he made, if parents brought up their children to dress consistently with their Christian profession. The Society, however, recommended only simplicity and plainness to be attended to on this occasion. They prescribed no standard, no form, no colour, for the apparel of their members. They acknowledged the two great objects of decency and comfort, and left the members to their own choice, and to the discretion of their parents, as to the agreeable to their convenience or their disposition.

A new era commenced from this period. Persons already in the Society continued of course in their ancient dresses. If others had come into it by conviction, who had laid gay lives, they laid aside their gaudy garments, and took those that were more plain; and the children of both, from this time, began to be habited from their youth as their parents were.

But though Friends had thus brought apparel under the disciplinary cognizance of the Society, yet the dress of individuals was not always alike; nor did it continue always one and the same even with the primitive members of it; nor has it continued one and the same with their descendants. For, decency and comfort, the two great objects of dress, which a latitude was given as to admit of great variety in apparel.—Hence, if we were to see a group of modern Friends before us, we should probably not find any two of them dressed alike. Health, we all know, may require alterations in dress. Simplicity may suggest others. Convenience, again, may point out others; and yet all these various alterations, which are made, are the objects of the Society, and here it may be observed that the Society, during its existence for a century and a half, has without doubt, in some degree, imperceptibly followed the world, though not in its fashions, yet in its improvements of clothing.

It must be obvious, again, that some people are of a grave and of a lively disposition, and that these will probably make different choices. Other members, again, particularly the rich, have a larger intercourse than the rest of them, or mix more with the world. These, again, will probably dress a little differently from others; and yet, regarding the two great objects of dress, their clothing may come within the limits which these allow. Indeed, if there be any, whose apparel would be thought exceptional by the Society, these would be found among the rich. Money, in all societies, generally takes the liberty of introducing exceptions. Nothing, however, is more true than that even among the poorest of the Society there is frequently as much plainness and simplicity in their outward dress as among the poor; and where the exceptions exist, they are seldom carried to an extravagant, and never to a preposterous, extent.

From this account it will be seen, that the ideas of the world are erroneous on the subject of the dress of the Society; for the ways by which Friends have dressed, and the ways by which they now dress, they met to deliberate and fix upon some standard, which should operate as a political institution, by which the members should be distinguished by their apparel from the rest of the world. The whole history, however, of the shape and colour of the garments of the Society is as has been related, namely, that the primitive members dressed like the sober, steady, and religious people of the age; and that the Society, during its existence, has not departed less, in a course of time, than others from the dress of their ancestors. The men's hats are nearly the same now, and many of their clothes are nearly of the same shape and colour, as in the days of George Fox. The dress of the women, too, is nearly similar. 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